UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.483
30 September 1998

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Nineteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 483rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 24 September 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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Initial report of Iraq

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GE.98-18386 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Iraq (continued) (CRC/C/41/Add.3; CRC/C/Q/IRAQ/1; written replies of the Government of Iraq to the questions asked in the list of issues)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Iraq resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation to resume their replies to the questions asked by Committee members at the previous meeting.

3. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq), responding to questions relating to the general legal framework for ensuring implementation of the rights of the child in Iraq, said that Iraqi domestic law currently incorporated the measures specified in article 4 of the Convention, which could be invoked in the national courts. Legislation adopted since accession to the Convention was compatible with its provisions, but should any incompatibility be found with earlier legislation, there was a rule enabling judges to overcome that problem, since the provisions of the Convention took precedence over national legislation. Indeed, in relation to article 41 of the Convention, there were a number of provisions in Iraqi law that added to the safeguards for children provided in the Convention, for example in the area of ensuring observation of the best interests of the child. The Department of Human Rights was the authority responsible for seeing that Iraq's commitments in the field of human rights were met and for ensuring the compatibility of domestic legislation with the Convention.

4. The central body principally concerned with implementation of the Convention was the Child Welfare Authority established under Act No. 272 of 1982, made up of representatives of the Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs, Education, Health and Culture and Information, the Planning Board, the National Federation of Iraqi Students and Youth, the General Federation of Iraqi Women and two experts in the field chosen by the head of the Authority. The responsibilities of the Child Welfare Authority included: drawing up general policies for protection and promotion of the child; coordinating the activities of bodies working in the field; improving children's services; monitoring the progress of programmes established by various authorities; adopting resolutions for amendment of existing legislation or promulgation of new legislation; coordinating with the responsible authorities the organization of conferences and seminars and Iraqi participation in similar events organized by international or Arab bodies; coordinating with the responsible authorities the research and collection of statistics on children; submitting proposals for agreements between Iraq and other Arab or other States relating to cooperation with regard to protection of children; consulting national and international experts and dealing with matters relating to the activities of bodies concerned with child welfare. The decisions of the Authority were subject to approval by the Vice-President of Iraq. It was therefore clear that Iraq had been giving special attention to child welfare well before it had acceded to the Convention. Funding was made available for protection of the rights of the child.

5. A question had been asked about non-governmental organizations. Two such organizations, the National Federation of Iraqi Students and Youth and the General Federation of Iraqi Women were represented on the Child Welfare Authority, which among other matters was responsible for the welfare of minors detained under a court order issued under article 22 of the Juvenile Code. Concern for children's rights was included among the activities of a number of non-governmental organizations with a more general mandate, such as the Red Crescent Society and the General Federation of Iraqi Women. The latter worked with other bodies, governmental and non-governmental, that were concerned with the welfare of women, children and the family. It carried out studies aimed at improving legislation with a view to ensuring equality between men and women and promoting family welfare and had also established a consultative body on child welfare. The Federation of Iraqi Students and Youth also provided services for children, maintained contacts with children in State institutions and was active in the prevention of child abuse. Various clubs existed to enable young people to participate in sports. The Red Crescent Society was concerned with child welfare in the context of its work with the health authorities. It also assisted other voluntary organizations in their work with children. Iraq was endeavouring to create awareness of the need to promote the welfare of mothers, children and families, to ensure that attention was paid to reproductive health and to strengthen voluntary organizations. The Iraqi Child Support Association promoted measures to assist children, such as disability centres.

6. In addition to national non-governmental organizations, Iraq worked with international non-governmental organizations, many of which were giving assistance in dealing with the consequences of the embargo. Such organizations worked either directly with Iraq or through UNICEF or UNDP on joint projects within the country. In addition, many national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were seeking consultative status with the United Nations. National groups of non-governmental advisers, such as the Iraqi Human Rights Committee - a group of individuals working for the protection of human rights - were also consulted by the Government.

7. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) said that many international NGOs, based both in Arab countries and elsewhere, had been assisting Iraq in its efforts since 1990 to cope with the health needs of women and children, given the reduction in its financial resources following the embargo. Those organizations were working either directly with Iraq or through UNICEF, WHO and FAO, which themselves were working with Iraq, to help implement programmes for the welfare of children and young people. A number of programmes, such as the expanded programme on immunization (EPI), were aimed at improving child health. Iraq had re-instituted the EPI programme in 1995, having received vaccines and the cold chain for storing and transporting them from UNICEF and other organizations. Immunization campaigns within the framework of poliomyelitis eradication had been carried out each year from 1995 to 1998. Over 3,250,000 children had been immunized against polio in 1995. A national campaign to immunize children against measles had been carried out in 1995 and that had been followed by a campaign in 1996 to immunize mothers against illness in the perinatal period.

8. In cooperation with international and non-governmental organizations, Iraq had distributed over 1,000 tons of food to children in need through food aid centres set up for the purpose. Complete transparency was observed in the reception and distribution of such supplies. Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (the food-for-oil agreement) with the United Nations had enabled some but not all of the needs of women and children for food and medicine to be met. As a result of difficulties created by some members of the Committee established under Security Council resolution 661 (1990), no more than 70 per cent of the first phase envisaged under the Memorandum had been completed, while implementation of the fourth and final phase had still not been started. The Government's shortage of financial resources since 1990 has meant that health and preventive programmes had suffered and the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including mothers and children, had been denied adequate assistance. Some programmes in existence before 1990, such as the immunization campaigns against hepatitis B and against mumps, measles and rubella, had had to be halted, with many cases of those diseases occurring as a result.

9. The CHAIRPERSON invited Committee members to ask questions and comment on issues relating to definition of the child and general principles.

10. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked for information on the other national NGOs concerned with children's matters, in addition to the three mentioned.

11. According to paragraph 4 of the written response to question 9 of the list of issues, the minimum legal age for marriage was 18 years. Did actual practice differ from that? For example, girls from very conservative families often married very young. It was understandably difficult to change long-standing habits and traditions and, in addition, as the report acknowledged, children reached sexual maturity early in Iraq. What had been the impact of the campaigns run by the General Federation of Iraqi Women to raise awareness of the harmful effects of early marriage?

12. With regard to the right to life, which was said to be guaranteed by the Penal Code, she asked what the attitude was to abortion in view of the early sexual maturity in Iraq or in cases of pregnancy following rape.

13. The embodiment of equality between men and women in the law was welcome, but she wondered how it was applied in practice in view of the fact that the Islamic Sharia did not recognize the full equality of men and women. She recalled that during the preparatory work for the Beijing Conference, and at the Conference itself, there had been considerable discussion of equality, in which the Islamic countries had expressed a preference for the term equity. Was there any discrimination in terms of promotion, remuneration or on grounds of the need for maternity leave or time off for breast-feeding, suffered by the many women who held responsible posts in Iraq?

14. Ms. PALME said she shared Mrs. Ouedraogo's concerns about the situation of young girls. While welcoming the campaign to provide education on reproductive health matters, she asked whether it also reached out to young men. It was disappointing that no representative of the General Federation of Iraqi Women had been included in the delegation, since even if women enjoyed full equality it was still useful to have their participation. What was being

done to enable children's views to be heard in schools and elsewhere? Judges could perhaps ensure their views were heard in courts. Were any changes envisaged in that respect?

15. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that following the responses of the Iraqi delegation at the previous meeting, she would recommend strengthening the central government body responsible for the implementation of the Convention, the Child Welfare Authority. A special effort should be made to ensure that it had sufficient visibility, resources and political standing within the Government to act decisively on behalf of the children of Iraq. She had been gratified to hear of the Authority's cooperation with international and local NGOs. It was important that Governments should work in a creative partnership with civil society. The programmes that had been put in place in Iraq with the cooperation of NGOs should also receive support from the Government. The information provided regarding the National Plan was also welcome. She stressed that point because the Convention was a very comprehensive document that covered a wide range of children's rights. It was important, therefore, for every aspect of the life of the child to be borne in mind. The multisectoral nature of the Authority and its integration with the National Plan embodied the kind of approach that the Committee liked to see. She understood, however, that the Plan had been drafted in 1994 and adopted in 1995. Since it established targets and goals, it was important that it should be revised and that realistic and concrete goals should be set for the next few years. If such a global approach were adopted, the Government of Iraq would be able to continue to work actively to improve the situation of children in the country notwithstanding current constraints.

16. Reverting to the section of the list of issues entitled General Principles, she joined those colleagues who had stressed the situation of the girl child. It appeared from the information provided that the rate of enrolment of girls in school did not differ greatly from that for boys. However, it could well be that some discrimination still existed in practice. The female literacy rate was not as good as that for males. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be integrated with that of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. She would like more information on the situation of girl children in traditional families and in rural areas, where it was generally more difficult to bring about a change of attitude.

17. Mrs. MOKHUANE also stressed the importance of integrating the implementation of the Convention with the National Plan for Children, especially in regard to efforts to rehabilitate children suffering from the effects of war and of the trade embargo. In regard to the definition of the child, she noted that the Convention recognized the child's evolving capacity. She would like to know, therefore, the age of sexual consent for a child, the age at which a child had the right to receive medical counselling, the age at which the child had the legal capacity to lodge a complaint, and the age at which it had the right to participate in legal proceedings. She also wished to know whether any measures had been put in place by the Government to ensure that girls were accorded the same privileges within the family as boys.

18. Mr. RABAH said that there were situations in which the "best interests of the child" could conflict with the interests of the State or with matters

of custom and tradition or religious belief. He would like further information, therefore, on the authority of the courts in Iraq in cases in which there was a conflict between the Convention and national legislation. Had any position been taken by legal authorities in Iraq from the point of view of the best interests of the child, either in a civil or a criminal connection? Could the powers of a guardian over a minor be derogated and handed over to another person if that was in the child's best interest? He noted that Iraq had entered certain reservations concerning adoption at the time of its accession to the Convention. He asked whether the system of adoption in Iraq was the same as that in other Muslim countries where it was governed by Islamic law.

19. He noted from the report that there were certain exceptions to the rule whereby a person under the age of 18 was considered to be a child. One was in regard to volunteering for the armed forces. A child under 18 needed the agreement of his guardian to do so. Presumably, however, he could volunteer at an earlier age. If he did so at the age of 12 or 14, for example, could he in fact be accepted by the army? The Declaration recently adopted in Rome, in which Iraq had participated, stated that it was an international crime for a child under 15 to join the armed forces and to participate in hostilities. In the case of the minimum age for medical consultation, certain activities, such as a surgical operation, needed the consent of a guardian. If that consent could not be obtained because of the absence of the guardian, would the operation be postponed despite the agreement of the child?

20. Mrs. KARP endorsed Mrs. Sardenberg's recommendation that the Child Welfare Authority should be strengthened, and asked whether the Government had considered adding the Ministry of Finance to the partners in that central body. Ministries of Finance tended to be grudging over resources unless they were fully involved in the related deliberations. She would also like to know how the Authority collaborated with the local authorities and whether it was in direct touch with the field.

21. In connection with the definition of the child, she would like further information on early marriage, including the number of court consents to marriage under the age of 18. Could marriage take place at under 15 years of age? Did judges concur with the belief expressed in some quarters that sexual maturity came early in the Middle East? Were requirements of physical and mental fitness for marriage ever discussed? She would like to know the results of the public campaign against early marriage in respect of applications for court consent.

22. Regarding the minimum age for medical counselling without parental consent, she found it interesting that such counselling was permitted without the consent of the guardian except in the case of surgical operations. She wondered, however, how young children seeking such counselling without their parents were protected from abuse by charlatans. Was there any official point from which they could receive advice on the choice of physician?

23. She noted that, under the Iraqi Constitution, all citizens were equal and could not be discriminated against on grounds of sex, race, language, social origin or religion. Did resident non-citizens enjoy the same rights or were certain rights not guaranteed to them? She would like further

information on the situation of the Turkomans and the population of the Southern Marsh Region in respect of equality and protection against discrimination. In regard to gender equality, she would like more information about the legislation referred to in the reply to question 14 of the list of issues. How were the rights of women enhanced by that legislation and what had been the results of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women?

24. Lastly, with regard to the principles set forth in article 12 of the Convention regarding the views of the child, she noted that the written answer gave the impression that, while it was not forbidden, there was no obligation to consult the opinions of children in matters of concern to them, such as proceedings for divorce. The message of the Convention was a combination of the principles of the best interests of the child and of respect for the views of the child, in the sense that the child's best interests could not be known unless the child had the right to express its views and be heard. The same applied in the home. She asked whether parents in Iraq listened to their children, or whether the tradition that children should be seen and not heard and that parents knew best what was good for them still operated?

25. Mrs. MBOI said that, even in the adverse conditions of wartime in 1983-1989, Iraq had been able to make considerable advances in child protection and survival. She believed that, with the strengthening of the Child Welfare Authority and the mobilization of NGOs, the Government could make still further advances despite the current situation. The impact of the war had brought many changes in the system of family values and in patterns of behaviour: the increase in the number of single parent families, the rise in the number of disabled, the change in the status and role of working women etc. The children's rights approach, using the Convention as a tool, could again bring about the emergence of the child as a national priority.

26. Ms. PALME had an additional question in regard to inheritance. Were girls and boys equally entitled to inherit from their parents?

27. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO had a question regarding the duration of compulsory education. What steps were taken to ensure that all children of school age in fact attended school, especially in the current circumstances? In the written reply, the age from 6 to 18 was referred to as the age for school attendance. However, the Committee was also told that children could work as of the age of 15. If a child of over 15 was working, could he also continue his education?

28. The CHAIRPERSON said that entry to the armed forces under the age of 15 conflicted with the provisions of the Convention. With regard to the principle of non-discrimination, she noted that the Convention had primacy in regard to legislative practice within the country. She wondered whether, in addition to harmonizing its legislation in that connection, consideration was being given to extending such harmonization to other areas of the Convention.

29. Mr. KOLOSOV said that, according to Iraqi legislation, armed forces volunteers should be not less than 14 years of age. Thus, a 14-year-old boy could volunteer. However, according to the Convention, the minimum age for involvement in the armed forces was 15. The delegation had stated that, in

cases of conflict between national law and international obligations under the Convention, primacy was given to international law. Could the delegation confirm, therefore, that 14-year-old boys were not accepted into the armed forces on a voluntary basis?

30. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Iraq to respond to the further questions put by the members of the Committee.

31. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) said that, in accordance with the Constitution, whereby all citizens of Iraq were equal before the law, the Turkoman minority in Iraq were Iraqi citizens and enjoyed all the rights accorded to such citizens, including cultural rights. To give the Committee a full understanding of the situation, he would describe the position in respect of education and the use of minority languages of all the minorities in Iraq. In 1969, the Revolutionary Council had decided that, in view of the friendly and fraternal relations between the two main ethnic groups, Arabs and Kurds, the citizens of the northern zone should be given the right to use Kurdish in all spheres of life and to study in Kurdish up to the end of secondary education. A detailed decision had been taken at a later date regarding teaching in Kurdish at the universities and in military and police academies. All audio-visual aids used in education were to be made available in Kurdish. At the same time, Arabic was also taught in all the schools where Kurdish was the teaching language. Arrangements were made for all libraries to hold Kurdish texts and Kurdish authors were allowed to create an Authors' Association and were given help in publishing their works through the establishment of a special Kurdish printing office. A weekly newspaper and a monthly publication were published in Kurdish and the production of Kurdish language television programmes was encouraged. All schools in the Kurdish area were given Kurdish names.

32. In 1970, the Revolutionary Council had adopted a decision providing for teaching in the Turkoman language at the primary level. A Turkoman teaching service was organized within the Ministry of Education and audio-visual materials in Turkoman were provided to the schools concerned. In the case of other minority groups, such as the Chaldeans, Assyrians and Armenians, the minority language was used in all primary schools in which they constituted a majority. Arabic was the teaching language in secondary schools, but the minority language was also taught wherever they were in the majority. Syriac was taught at the university of Baghdad, but as an ancient language. With regard to Christian children in Iraqi schools, as he had indicated at the previous meeting, if at least 25 per cent of the pupils were Christian, the school was obliged to provide teaching in the Christian religion.

33. A question had been asked about the cultural rights of the people of the Southern Marsh Region. He believed that any differences between the inhabitants of that region and the people of the rest of Iraq were largely fabricated by the media. None of the South's ethnic, religious or even linguistic characteristics differed from those of the Centre. Children in the South enjoyed the same rights as those in the rest of the country.

34. In regard to gender equality, Iraqi legislation was particularly favourable. Iraq was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and was currently preparing its second report to

the treaty body concerned. After the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, Iraq had adopted a National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women, up to and including the year 2005. A special body had been set up under the Ministry of Social Affairs, including representatives of the Ministries of Justice and Education, the National Planning Authority, the Women's Federation, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Special units had been established in all the national Ministries to promote the Strategy and report on its progress, particular attention being given to the situation of girl children.

35. The fairly equal gender distribution among the 70,000 children in kindergarten, the slightly over 3 million in primary education and the slightly over 1 million in secondary education demonstrated that gender discrimination did not exist within the education system. On the subject of marriage, the relevant legislation required that both would-be spouses should be of sound mind, although judges could authorize the marriage of a person who was mentally ill if they considered that it posed no threat to the safety of the family or of society. A girl under the age of 15 could be authorized by a judge to enter into marriage, with the agreement of her parents or guardians, provided she was considered to be of sufficient physical and mental maturity. Extremely strict health and welfare criteria were applied to protect persons under the age of 18.

36. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) explained that responsibility for reproductive health lay with the Family Planning Institute, the Ministry of Health and the General Union of Women. Family planning clinics offered educational and awareness-raising activities, in addition to family planning and birth control services. Seminars had recently been organized by the General Union of Women throughout Iraq in connection with such issues.

37. Eligibility to volunteer for military service was confined to the 14-28 age bracket, with volunteers under the age of 18 requiring paternal consent. It was not possible to join the army before the age of 18. It was to be noted in that connection that Iranian soldiers of under 15 years of age had been taken prisoner by the Iraqi forces during the war, while Iraqi prisoners had all been at least 18 years old. As regards the manner in which courts defended the best interests of children, the Law on the Protection of Young People required that both potential adoptive parents were required to submit an application for adoption, which would be granted by the juvenile court only if it was entirely satisfied that the prospective parents were fully able to protect the rights and best interests of the child, and subject to a trial period of six months, extendable for a further six months, during which time a social worker would visit the couple's home at least once a month to confirm their desire to foster and care for the child. Should one prospective parent desist, or the court find that the adoption was not in the best interests of the child, then the child would be placed in the care of an appropriate institution. In the event that the adoption application was granted, the law required that the mother should refrain from working outside the home until the child came of age. The limited number of women in Iraqi delegations to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child was to be attributed, during the 1990s, to the effects of the embargo. However, the present

delegation contained a female representative of the Foreign Office and it was to be hoped that the number of women on delegations in the future would be higher.

38. While the Ministry of Finance, as an executive body, allocated to child welfare organizations the sums decided by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry was not actually involved in the activities of such organizations.

39. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) said that children could be submitted to two types of medical examination, firstly as a matter of routine and secondly in the event of an emergency which might necessitate surgery, for which the guardian's authorization was required. Where immediate action was necessary to save a child's life, a committee of three specialists could take that decision in the absence of the guardian.

40. The practice of abortion was punishable under the Criminal Code by imprisonment or fine of both the woman in question and the practitioner. Certain attenuating circumstances might be taken into consideration, for example, if the woman performed the abortion herself.

41. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) added that abortions could be performed legally where a specialist committee considered that termination was necessary to protect the health or life of the woman.

42. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) said that fines could be imposed on persons, including grandparents, who removed infants from their parents, and penalties of imprisonment, fines or corporal punishment for endangering the life of children under the age of 15, for abandoning children or for preventing them from returning to their parents. Foreigners residing in Iraq enjoyed the same rights as Iraqi citizens, including access to medical care.

43. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) added that primary health care was available to all children, irrespective of their nationality, while a symbolic fee was charged to foreign children for other types of treatment. In connection with the Hopkins University study on services to children during the war, Iraq's political intentions had not changed but, as a result of the embargo, the resources to give effect to development policy measures had been severely curtailed. Nonetheless, Iraq's determination to protect its children was unshaken and the delegation welcomed a constructive dialogue with the Committee in the interests of improving the lot of children in Iraq.

44. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) provided further details regarding the effects of war damage on child health, including the inferior quality of drinking water, problems with sewage and waste disposal leading to the proliferation of rodents and insects, and a sharply reduced electricity supply, which was required, amongst so many other needs, to store vaccines. However, the Government and people of Iraq were working together to the best of their ability to provide primary health care for all children.

45. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) said that independent figures for 1989 showed that Iraq had been among the countries that had advanced furthest in reducing infant mortality, standing at that time at 29 per 1,000, and under-five mortality, standing at under 60 per 1,000. However, those figures had risen

fourfold since the aggression against Iraq and the ensuing embargo. Nonetheless, a wide-ranging campaign had been launched in many spheres including immunization, primary health care, provision of drinking water, prevention of gastric and respiratory disease, training of midwives, promotion of breastfeeding, paediatric care, health education in schools, all with the participation of the community. A system had been introduced for rationing medication and vaccines, and distributing scarce medical appliances and equipment. Environmental management techniques, were in operation, while particular attention had been devoted to providing health education and information at all levels. An in-depth assessment was also being undertaken of existing problems with a view to establishing a scale of priorities.

46. Mr. HUSSAIN (Iraq) would transmit Mrs. Sardenberg's recommendation to his Government. While he agreed that the five-year programme did not attend to all children's rights, priority had been given to the right to survival, which implied, first and foremost, food and medical care. With UNICEF's assistance, the situation was being improved. The Ministry for Social Affairs operated 45 rehabilitation centres for the deaf and disabled, although their capacity had been reduced as a result of the embargo. Similarly, the absence of oil revenues seriously obstructed health and food programmes.

47. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq), responding to the question concerning the duration of compulsory education, said that, under Compulsory Education Act No. 118, all children aged six at the start of the school year had to attend school up to the age of 12, a provision that in no way contradicted that of the Convention, whereby children could work from the age of 15. In reply to Mr. Rabah, he said that there were three age-related categories of minors: from birth to three, from three to 18, and from birth to seven. The Civil Code stipulated that acts committed by minors had no legal validity. Lacking discernment, they required the control of a guardian. However, article 97 provided that acts of a minor that were purely to his advantage were regarded as valid, even without the guardian's consent, while acts which could be considered disadvantageous were conditional on the guardian's consent.

48. With regard to criminal responsibility, article 64 of the Code of Criminal Procedure had established the age of seven as that of criminal responsibility at which a child could be prosecuted, but the limit had been raised to nine under the Welfare of Minors Act. The Personal Status Act authorized marriage from the age of 15, the age at which a minor could also dispose of his property under the Welfare of Minors Act.

49. Regarding respect for the views of the child in schools and in the courts, in schools the National Association of Iraqi Students, with representatives elected from among the student body, could express students' views and voice their concerns, without prejudice to the right of individual students to file complaints or express their opinions to the pertinent authorities. In secondary schools, a model student might be elected to represent his colleagues. As stated in the written replies submitted by Iraq, in the courts a witness over 15 years of age had to take an oath, while the testimony of persons below that age, who were not regarded as full legal witnesses, might be heard as evidence but without an oath being taken. The procedure whereby the Court could hear custody cases to protect the best interests of the child would be explained subsequently.

50. Responding to a question by Ms. Palme, he said that inheritance in all Muslim countries was governed by unequivocal and compulsory legislation on the rights of men and women, justified by the fact that the Islamic Sharia had been the first legislation in the world to endow women with rights they had not previously enjoyed, such as independent status and independent property rights. When a woman married she retained possession of her property and did not need to relinquish it to her husband. The allocation of a larger share of inheritance to the man under the Sharia went hand in hand with greater obligations on him, since he was required to support his wife even if she was rich. The legislation was therefore not discriminatory in the strict sense of article 1 of the Convention and had posed no problems in any Arab country. Equality prevailed with regard to the inheritance of land in Iraq.

51. Mr. HUSSAIN (Iraq), in response to Mrs. Sardenberg's question on literacy, added that Act No. 118 had decreed six years of compulsory education for all children from the age of three, while the 1994 decision of the Revolution Command Council had established free and compulsory general education. UNICEF had applauded the results of Iraq's 1978 National Campaign for the Compulsory Elimination of Illiteracy, which obliged parents to send their children to school between the ages of four and 16 or, failing that, to a literacy centre.

52. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) informed the Committee that his delegation would distribute a number of statistical tables at the next meeting.

53. The CHAIRPERSON invited Committee members to ask follow-up questions on the issues addressed by the Iraqi delegation, and proceed to questions on civil rights and freedoms and family environment and alternative care.

54. Mrs. MOKHUANE said that her question on guarantees with regard to the best interests of the child had been partially answered by the excerpts from the Constitution cited by the Iraqi delegation, demonstrating the existence of some guarantees that had not been spelled out in Iraq's initial report. She was, however, still disturbed by the notion of 14 years as the minimum age for voluntary enlistment in the army, an area fraught with danger. The extremely broad and complex term "best interests of the child" perforce encompassed children's safety, so that the legislation in question infringed the right of the child to protection, development and survival. Her second concern was the report's silence on the subject of landmines in Iraq, which were certainly not in the best interests of the child. She wondered whether any guarantees existed in that regard.

55. Mrs. KARP had noted during the description given of the Committee for Gender Equality that, unless it was a mistake in the written answers, the Minister for Justice was not included in the Child Welfare Authority. Although the latter had been established in 1982, prior to ratification of the Convention, implementation of the Convention did include legal issues; and although the presence of the Finance Minister was certainly useful, the presence of the Minister of Justice was surely vital; she asked the delegation to consider including him. With regard to early marriage, the legislative requirement for court approval was an important and commendable step towards limiting the phenomenon; the need for a court decision on the mental state of the girl was another important point. However, given the prohibition of

sexual relations outside marriage and the consequent absence of an age of consent, was it not a fact that parents might approve marriage in order to prevent extramarital sexual relations, obviously believing they were protecting the best interests of their daughter? There was clearly a conflict of interests in that case, and it would be interesting to know how it was dealt with. What guaranteed that the judge was not influenced by the parents' wishes?

56. On page 48 of the written replies, regarding the National Plan for Children up to the Year 2000, point (iv), under State-run hostels for children, mentioned encouragement of marriages between inmates. What was the basis of that policy? Did it not encourage early marriages? If it referred to a limited number of early marriages only and was not the rule, the implications were limited; but if it was general procedure it might raise questions about the results of the campaign and about attitudes reflected in the legislation that required court approval. Clearly, early marriages were opposed in theory, but what was the situation in practice?

57. With regard to hearing the views of the child, what was the attitude of the courts and administration with regard to children, and what was the procedure for complaints? Obviously, in schools there was the Association of Students, but it was important to remember that sometimes a child was afraid to complain. Was there any procedure, not only in schools but in welfare institutions and institutions for children in conflict with the law, or within the structure of the Welfare Authority, to encourage the child to complain, to ensure the child would not be harmed for complaining, and to make it easy to complain - not to people from within the institution but to an external body; visitors, or inspectors?

58. Unfortunately, there had been no clear answer to the previous day's question on whether Iraq had considered establishing an independent institution to air complaints from children and to focus on the views of children, in order to implement that part of the Convention on making children visible and active participants in society. There was a concern that the Child Welfare Authority was not structured so as to be available to deal with private complaints, nor did it have full nationwide coverage for cases of infringements of children's rights. Was there any possibility of establishing an independent institution to encourage children to speak out?

59. Public attitudes, and particularly parental attitudes, to hearing the child were a cultural issue, not adequately covered in the report or the written replies. It was helpful to understand the prevalent culture. What was the attitude towards dialoguing with the child instead of maintaining a position of authority supported by corporal punishment? What was being done to educate parents to move from a position of responsibility and the assumption that they knew what was best for the child, towards taking the child's views and feelings into account? What procedures guaranteed that the best interests of the child were a prime consideration in daily life in institutions? Were there any counselling services for children or adolescents, such as telephone help lines or special clinics, where they could air their concerns and feelings?

60. Finally, concerning the gap between the end of compulsory education at age 12 and the legal age for admission to work at 15, what were children who did not continue their education meant to do during those three years? Surely it would be more reasonable to make education compulsory until the age of 15, when it was considered appropriate for children to start work.

61. While it was true that school registration figures showed only slight differences between boys and girls, the statistics for school drop-outs, particularly in the 12-14 age range, and especially in rural areas, demonstrated that fewer girls continued with education. Comments were invited from the delegation on that point.

62. Mrs. SARDENBERG welcomed the reference to the presentation of the document adopted by the Beijing Conference, which asked for national strategies and which included a chapter on the girl child. She welcomed the proclamation of the National Strategy in that respect, but stressed that action was needed to change attitudes. Were educational materials free from stereotypes of gender roles in society?

63. Despite the UNICEF and UNESCO prizes for the literacy campaign, the current situation in the country had led to a worrying trend of increasing illiteracy rates, rising more rapidly among women, demonstrating that their situation was still more vulnerable.

64. In relation to the right to life, and with regard to declining nutrition levels, how did the food distribution and rationing system that had been introduced work? With specific regard to civil rights and freedoms, the Committee keenly supported registration at birth, since registration vested the individual with citizenship and its accompanying rights. However Committee members had heard that registration of births was difficult in rural areas; that was a matter for concern, in view of the fact that the food distribution system was based on individual cards. Could the delegation elaborate on how the issue of unregistered children was dealt with?

65. Page 44 of the written answers, in reply to question 20 of the list of issues, stated that the branding and amputation decrees had been repealed by Revolution Command Council Decree No. 81 of 1996; however, observations by the Human Rights Committee expressing concern about the imposition of those cruel punishments and requesting their repeal had been made again in 1997. Could the delegation confirm that the Decree had actually been adopted and that those punishments had been eliminated? Perhaps a misunderstanding had occurred.

66. In that connection, since Iraq was already a State party to five of the major human rights treaties, and had been presenting periodic reports to many of the treaty bodies, was the Government considering becoming a State party to the Convention against Torture?

67. Finally, could the delegation elaborate on the regulations and procedures to guarantee review of placement of children in institutions, in accordance with article 25 of the Convention?

68. Ms. PALME stressed the importance of the changes that would be generated by Iraq's decision concerning punishment. On the subject of child registration, population groups in some areas were not assiduous in registering their children. Failure to do so could engender ration-related and other problems. She would like to know what the reasons were for their reluctance to register. She also wished to know the situation regarding the periodic reviews required by article 25 of the Convention.

69. Mr. RABAH asked precisely what alternative protection was provided for children by the State in the event of the break-up of the family or the death of a parent, and whether there were any organizations for protecting children abandoned in that way. Did membership of a tribe or belonging to a particular region provide greater access to that type of family support? How were child-protection institutions monitored? He would also like to know the mechanisms through which non-Iraqi children could benefit from the services provided by family-protection institutions.

70. With regard to family violence and child exploitation, Arab societies were traditionally very severe towards children, in the interests of strict education and discipline. Children were sometimes exposed to sexual or other abuse or inappropriate sexual behaviour within the family. He wondered whether the repercussions of a child's official complaints were sometimes worse than the original abuse. What was the authorities' attitude to such complaints? Could neighbours intervene on the child's behalf in cases of violence or submit a complaint? He would like information about cases of that kind which had been heard by the courts. Bearing in mind the specificity of Iraq and neighbouring countries, he wished to know whether there was any special body for receiving such complaints. If not, he suggested one should be established to serve the best interests of the child.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.484
27 November 1998

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Nineteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 484th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 24 September 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Iraq (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Iraq (continued) (CRC/C/41/Add.3; CRC/C/Q/IRAQ/1 (list of issues); written replies of the Government of Iraq to the questions raised in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Iraq resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee who so wished to ask the delegation of Iraq additional questions.

3. Mrs. MBOI said that she would like to receive fuller information on the situation of children in alternative care. The number of children placed in State-run hostels had decreased and she wished to know what difficulties were involved in returning to the family, a child previously cared for by the State. Noting that the Iraqi Government had established a plan of action in that regard, she asked whether the implementation of the plan had been evaluated, and what the prospects for the future were. What measures had the Government taken to ensure that the law prohibiting family violence was respected? She would also like to have more information on the measures taken to monitor the health of children and adolescents, in the light, inter alia, of the war and the influence of the media. Had surveys been conducted? Was it true that an epidemic of measles was currently ravaging the country and, if so, were there enough vaccines? If not, what was the State doing to remedy the situation? On the issue of malnutrition, the increase in the number of children suffering from nutritional deficiencies was of great concern; had the State established a comprehensive nutrition strategy aimed at providing aid to the most seriously affected children?

4. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she would like information on the problems Iraq might have encountered in implementing the Abortion Act and the Compulsory Education Act. In the case of teenage pregnancies, what was the State doing to help adolescent mothers and children born out of wedlock? Was there not a risk of marginalization? She noted that the law on nationality discriminated against women, since the child automatically took the nationality of the father. What happened when an Iraqi woman married a foreigner and could the children of foreign parents obtain Iraqi nationality? Furthermore, when a father refused to recognize his child, did that affect the child's rights?

5. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq), replying to the question about mines and the protection of children, said that Iraq had made considerable efforts in that regard and had, for example, spent US$ 1 million on mine clearance operations, both in the south and in the north of the country. Amputation was no longer inflicted as a punishment. Iraq had fulfilled all its obligations with regard to the preparation of reports to be submitted in accordance with the human rights instruments to which it was a party.

6. On the question of care by the State for children and adolescents deprived of their family environment, the State provided for all their needs free of charge (food, clothing, housing and money). Social Care Act No. 126 of 1980 provided for the placement in an institution or orphanage of children, including some young people over 18 years of age, who, for various reasons, were no longer under parental care. Such children received their schooling in ordinary schools at the appropriate academic level and received help with social reintegration. Any discrimination against them was prohibited and could be prosecuted. Orphanages had a social service which ensured the follow-up of children, looked into the possibility of placing them with a foster family and helped them to look for work or continue with higher education. It was, however, regrettable that the lack of available resources, made it impossible to care for as many children as previously.

7. With regard to violence towards children, the law prohibited the use of violence against pupils. As to violence within the family, it should be noted that cultural differences accounted for the fact that certain educational methods specific to Iraq might appear violent, but, in any case, children were protected against violence in general. The Minors Act authorized children to bring a legal case against their parents or guardians, as applicable. If the sentence confirmed the guilt of the parents or guardians, the child could be removed from their care. In addition, the General Federation of Iraqi Women offered a family consultation service which attempted to solve all problems relating to the family. Respect for the best interests of the child was guaranteed by the Welfare of Minors Act and the Juvenile Welfare Act and the Ministry of Justice had a department responsible for overseeing and managing property belonging to minors on the death of their father.

8. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq), referring to the nutritional status of the Iraqi population, said that the implementation of the embargo had prevented the Government from combating malnutrition. Daily per capita intake, which had been 3,581 calories and 101.6 grammes of protein in 1988, had dropped to 1,030 calories and 24 grammes of protein in 1997. Studies carried out by UNICEF and WHO showed that children were suffering terribly from the situation caused by the embargo. Children under five years of age showed a rate of emaciation (inadequate weight for their height) of 22.06 per cent and a rate of retarded growth (height inadequate for their age) of 43.89 per cent. The infant mortality rate had risen to 111.7 per 1,000 in 1994 as against only 61.7 in 1990. The rate of mortality among under fives had been 140 per 1,000 in 1994. A comparison of infant mortality rates and under-fives mortality rates during the period before the war (1988-1989) with those for the period during which sanctions had been imposed (since 1990) showed that the infant mortality rate had doubled and the mortality rate among children under five years of age had increased sixfold. Such increases could be attributed mainly to the malnutrition of mothers and children (iodine deficiency, vitamin deficiency, anaemia in mothers and pregnant women) and to the prevalence of infectious diseases (diarrhoea, intestinal infections and acute respiratory ailments, inter alia).

9. Iraq had launched a national campaign in 1985 to implement the Expanded Programme on Immunization and control infectious diseases. Iraq had also joined the ranks of the most advanced countries in terms of its results in the fight against poliomyelitis. Unfortunately, the war and the embargo had led

to a sharp deterioration in the quality of health and sanitation services and social security benefits. Nonetheless, Iraq was making efforts to improve the health situation in the country, with the cooperation of WHO and UNICEF. He also noted that there were psychological problems (anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances) which affected between 60 and 80 per cent of women and children.

10. Mr. HUSSAIN (Iraq) said that, owing to the economic situation resulting from the continuation of the embargo, many children between 12 and 16 years of age had been forced to leave school to help their families. The school drop-out rate had increased from 1.9 per cent in the 1990-1991 school year to 3.4 per cent in 1994-1995 at the primary level, from 5.1 per cent to 7.6 per cent at the intermediate level and from 1.5 per cent to 1.8 per cent at the preparatory level. The problem of street children had arisen as a result of the economic consequences of the embargo. Needy families had been forced to put their children to work, although, under the Juvenile Welfare Act, any child under 15 years of age found begging in a public place or engaging in an itinerant activity was considered to be a vagrant. It was not rare for fathers to be penalized when their children carried out activities incompatible with their physical strength.

11. The marriage procedure in Iraq was regulated by the Personal Status Act, according to article 7 of which both spouses must be of sound mind and over 18 years of age for a marriage to be valid. Article 8 of the Act stipulated that, when a person aged over 15 years wished to marry, a judge could authorize the union if he was satisfied that the person requesting it was legally and physically ready for marriage and if the legal guardian had given consent. On the other hand, a young girl could not be pressured to marry through force or violence. The registration of births in rural areas no longer gave rise to a problem, particularly since 1990, because families had to present identity cards for their members in order to receive food tickets.

12. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) said that, in the southern provinces of Iraq, particularly in the marsh areas, births had not always been registered, and that had meant that not all children had benefited from the necessary care. At present, midwives had a form which enabled the father to notify the birth of the child to the nearest primary health-care centre, which then undertook to provide a birth certificate.

13. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) said that article 4 of the Nationality Act gave citizenship to any person born in Iraq or abroad of an Iraqi father, born in Iraq of an Iraqi mother and an unknown or stateless father, or born in Iraq of unknown parents. Consequently, Iraqi nationality depended on the nationality of the father.

14. Mrs. SARDENBERG thanked the Iraqi delegation for its detailed explanations and took note of the many positive points touched on. She encouraged the Government of Iraq to become a party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. She appreciated the delegation's frankness about the fact that, on account of traditions, it was difficult for children to bring complaints about possible ill-treatment to which they had been subjected by their parents or guardians and stressed that long-term efforts had to be made to raise awareness. It

would be good to promote the integration of children with disabilities into the ordinary educational system. While recognizing that Iraq was in a complex and difficult situation, she thought that the authorities ought to give priority attention to the most serious problems, such as infant mortality and the poor nutritional status of children. Were the rights of the child taught in schools and were specific measures taken in respect of the many refugee children? Emphasizing article 12 of the Convention, which was at the very heart of the Convention's message, she said that the school environment was a particularly favourable framework for developing the participation of children and their ability to express themselves freely.

15. The Iraqi authorities were already taking major steps to guarantee protection against anti-personnel mines, but, given the extent of the problem, it was to be hoped that they would intensify their efforts, particularly in terms of educating children and parents and rehabilitating victims. She recommended that, if it had not already done so, Iraq should become a State party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction, adopted in 1997. The authorities should also intensify their efforts to solve the problem of street children, who were particularly exposed to all kinds of violations of their rights.

16. Mrs. KARP said that she wished to have precise explanations about the gap between the age of the end of compulsory education and the authorized age for admission to employment. She would also like more information on the application of article 12 of the Convention, since it was important to ensure that the opinions of the child were duly taken into consideration in all circumstances, whether in the educational, family or medical fields. The information provided thus far had not reflected the basic idea that children had the right to their own personality and should be able to make their point of view heard. With regard to equality between boys and girls, the authorities needed to work harder to prevent girls from dropping out of school particularly by increasing awareness among families. Were disabled children able to attend ordinary schools? What was the proportion of disabled children in institutions? Had investigations and research been carried out on cases of suicide among children and adolescents and on the number of accidents they were involved in? Who conducted proceedings concerning children in conflict with the law in areas where there were no juvenile judges? In what establishments were juvenile delinquents who lived far from urban centres placed? Could a child be represented by an officially appointed defence lawyer? Did the police and the judicial authorities use international texts relating to juvenile justice, such as the Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) and the Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines)? Even if prostitution was an offence, why did young prostitutes have to serve a sentence before benefiting from rehabilitation and reintegration schemes? Surely they were more innocent victims than guilty parties?

17. Mrs. MBOI asked exactly what the new resources provided by the World Food Programme were being used for. Had the authorities drawn up a strategy or a distribution plan for getting the aid to the neediest children? Had measures been taken to ensure that the new resources reached the children who had the greatest need of them?

18. Mr. RABAH requested more information about street children, how many there were, their health situation, where they were found and how they were treated. What guarantees did juvenile delinquents benefit from during the preliminary inquiry and interrogations, which were the stages of legal proceedings most frequently associated with the risk of torture and ill-treatment? Were third parties present during interrogations? Were court hearings public? It was regrettable that an amnesty law had been applied to juvenile delinquents because, if they were amnestied, they could not benefit from the services of re-education centres. What fate awaited juvenile delinquents? What were their prospects for the future when they left an institution? Were there any programmes to prevent petty crime, bearing in mind that prevention cost less than the re-education of delinquents and marginal elements? Did the Ministry of Justice provide training on children's rights to social workers and members of the police forces? He also requested more information on the number of delinquents, the nature of the crimes committed, and the ethnic background of delinquents.

19. Mrs. PALME said that, despite the activities already carried out by the Iraqi Government, particularly in collaboration with UNICEF, much still remained to be done to prevent accidents caused by anti-personnel mines, given that there were still 4 million mines in Iraqi soil and to rehabilitate the victims. Had Iraq drawn up a plan of action following its participation in the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996, and how were child victims of sexual abuse and prostitution viewed?

20. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she was concerned about the number of children dropping out of school to help their parents and asked whether the National Plan for Children provided for measures to help such children benefit fully from their rights to education. The delegation had indicated that emphasis was placed on the education of children aged 7 to 10; however, education was compulsory in Iraq until 12 years of age. How were children from minority groups integrated; could they attend Iraqi schools if they wanted to? Did schools help in preventing and treating the psychological problems which many Iraqi children suffered from? Were there any traditional practices which affected the health of children and, if so, what measures were taken to eliminate them?

21. Mrs. MOKHUANE asked whether a certain proportion of children in Iraq continued to have a normal attitude despite their difficult situation and whether studies had been carried out on that issue. It might be possible on the basis of such research to formulate methods for helping traumatized children and those with psychological difficulties. Was there a minimum wage for children who worked?

22. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) said that the Social Welfare Act governed the rights of the disabled, who were categorized as physically or mentally handicapped and according to whether or not they were capable of working. It gave any disabled person the right to benefit from State-financed rehabilitation. There were also six categories of centres, depending on the type of disability. His delegation could provide the Committee with various tables and statistics on the number of disabled persons, the institutions in which they were housed and a breakdown of the statistics by gender. A diagnostic

centre decided which training establishment a disabled child should be sent to, but, unfortunately, its activities were suffering from the lack of resources. The idea of placing disabled children in ordinary schools was not generally accepted by teachers, who feared that the disabled child would feel ill at ease in comparison with other children. Despite the difficult economic circumstances, the authorities hoped to be able to open new training and rehabilitation centres.

23. It had been recommended that the Iraqi Government should establish priorities in its aid to children; the National Plan for Children showed that priority attention was already being given to the problems of mortality and nutrition and, above all, to the protection of the right to life and survival. As to the possibility of accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, he did not know exactly what his Government's position was, but thought that the requisite measures would be taken at the earliest opportunity. Replying to the questions on juvenile justice, he pointed out that the 1983 Juvenile Welfare Act covered all issues from the early diagnosis of delinquency to the reintegration of juvenile delinquents and that there was a social and psychological consultation service in each governorate. The relevant procedure during interrogations was in conformity with the provisions of the Convention. At the sentencing stage, the juvenile court decided, according to circumstances, either to imprison the delinquent or to place him in a rehabilitation centre. The Iraqi delegation could provide the Committee with tables and statistics on the various types of crimes committed by minors and the sentences handed down by the juvenile courts.

24. Mr. ABDULRIDHA (Iraq) said that, in order to help improve the health and nutritional status of children in Iraq, families received food aid in the form of rations of sugar, rice, tea, flour and oil, as well as milk for families with children under one year old. Such aid covered the basic needs of children and families, but it was unfortunately not always possible to guarantee an adequate intake of calories and proteins on a daily basis. In order to deal with the situation of children suffering from serious nutritional deficiencies, the Iraqi Government had, with the help of the World Food Programme and UNICEF, set up child nutrition centres throughout the national territory where specialists and volunteers cared for children suffering from malnutrition. There were also nutrition centres in child clinics and in general hospitals in the main towns. Sick children were cared for until their health improved and nutritional follow-up was also ensured once the children were better. Nevertheless, the necessary financial resources to stock the nutritional rehabilitation centres were not always available in sufficient quantities.

25. As to psychological help, the Ministry of Education and other ministries offered psychological services, social welfare assistants and consultants to help children traumatized by the war. Iraqi schools were open to all children, including those from minorities, whether Arabs, Turks, Turkmens or Assyrians, and education was compulsory for all until the end of primary school. Minority groups also had their own schools where children could be educated according to their parents' wishes, including the religious instruction of their choice.

26. The CHAIRPERSON, thanking the Iraqi delegation for its replies to the questions asked by the members of the Committee, said she hoped that further information would subsequently be provided on the points that had not yet been fully covered. She invited the members of the Committee to make their preliminary comments on the consideration of the initial report of Iraq.

27. Mr. KOLOSOV said that the disastrous consequences of the embargo on the situation of Iraqi children were particularly regrettable since the children themselves were not responsible for the political decisions taken by the country's leaders. It was therefore to be hoped that the international community would do everything possible to ensure the lifting of those provisions relating to the embargo which were affecting the humanitarian situation in Iraq.

28. Among the positive points, there was a wide-scale youth movement in the country which could play an important role in increasing young peoples' awareness of the rights provided for in the Convention. He noted with interest that the legislation on juvenile justice provided not for punishments, but for support and rehabilitation measures for juvenile delinquents. He also noted with satisfaction that education was compulsory and free and that medical examinations were regularly carried out in schools.

29. Among matters for concern, he regretted that children in Iraq were not fully able to participate in the promotion of their own rights as full citizens. Moreover, much remained to be done to eliminate the disparities between urban and rural populations and between the northern and southern provinces of the country. It was also regrettable that the Iraqi authorities did not have reliable statistics on the number of street children and working children, who were not continuing their education. It would be useful for military personnel to receive training in international humanitarian law, particularly in respect of children. Awareness-raising measures to that end could be taken in 1999, on the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Convention. In conclusion, he hoped that, when it submitted its next periodic report, the Government of Iraq would be able to report on the progress achieved in eliminating all the harmful effects of the embargo during the difficult years the country had been through.

30. Mrs. MOKHUANE said that she shared the opinions expressed by Mr. Kolosov. She too considered that every effort should be made to lift the embargo so that, in future, Iraqi children could lead a normal life. She welcomed the dialogue with the Iraqi delegation and assured it that she fully shared the concerns it had expressed to the Committee about the situation of children in Iraq.

31. Mrs. SARDENBERG also thanked the Iraqi delegation. She understood the difficulties and obstacles encountered in the country with regard to the situation of children and stressed that the Committee's task was to help States parties find solutions through dialogue.

32. Mrs. KARP said it was important that the Convention should be widely known to the population of Iraq because the new perception of the child formulated in it could lead to a complete change of attitude to the greater

benefit of children. She hoped that the Iraqi authorities would examine the Committee's recommendations in detail and apply them to the fullest possible extent.

33. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she shared the opinions expressed by the members of the Committee and also hoped that the embargo would be rapidly lifted so that Iraqi children could finally live a normal life. She emphasized, however, that, even if conditions were difficult, the State had a basic responsibility for the welfare of children. She suggested that the many provisions in Iraqi legislation concerning the protection and development of the child should be grouped together in a single document which could become the Children's Code.

34. Mrs. PALME said that she supported Mrs. Ouedraogo's suggestion and also shared the opinions expressed by the other members of the Committee. She emphasized the need to do the utmost to prevent the suffering of the civilion population during conflicts such as those Iraq had been through.

35. The CHAIRPERSON announced that the Committee would transmit its final observations, adopted following its consideration of the initial report of Iraq, to the Iraqi authorities. She sincerely hoped that, when the next report of Iraq was submitted, the situation of the rights of children in the country would have noticeably improved.

36. Mr. YOUSIF (Iraq) thanked the Committee for the constructive dialogue which it had established with the Iraqi delegation. He reiterated the invitation extended by the Government of Iraq to the members of the Committee to visit the country in order to assess the situation of Iraqi children on the spot and at first hand. His delegation had duly taken note of the observations and suggestions made by members of the Committee and would transmit them to the competent authorities in the hope that they would draw attention to the need fully to apply the Convention in order to help the children who lived in such difficult conditions in Iraq. He also sincerely hoped that, when Iraq submitted its next report to the Committee, the embargo would have been lifted and that the delegation would be able to report a considerable improvement in the situation of children in the country.

37. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the Iraqi delegation for its participation in the work of the Committee. She announced that the Committee had completed its consideration of the initial report of Iraq.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.